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Commission for Social Development
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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Congregations of St. Joseph, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2012/1.

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Statement

Poverty and lack of opportunities are the root causes of human trafficking

Context

Human trafficking is twenty-first-century slavery and it involves transporting, primarily women and children, within or across borders for sexual or labour exploitation. This includes forced work in prostitution, exotic dancing, domestic work, sweatshops, the agricultural sector and the construction and service industries. An estimated 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year.

Between 2002 and 2006, 1,331 trafficked persons were identified by the International Organization for Migration, of which half were trafficked for labour exploitation. Human trafficking is a violation of the human rights of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children around the globe.

The Chair of the Commission for Social Development at its forty-ninth session gave the following definition of poverty: "Extreme poverty is not simply a lack of adequate income ... individuals living in poverty experience multiple deprivations, restrictions in opportunities and social exclusion".

The General Assembly, in its resolution 64/293, recognized that poverty, unemployment, lack of socio-economic opportunities, gender-based violence, discrimination and marginalization are some of the contributing factors that make persons vulnerable to trafficking in persons.

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which aim to eradicate poverty, empower women and ensure access to education and health, would go a long way towards addressing the root causes of human trafficking.

Given the fact that poverty is a key contributing factor that makes people vulnerable to being trafficked, we point to the need for further work with regard to the definition of human trafficking contained in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, by acknowledging the subtle forms of coercion that might be at play. This is an important factor in protecting the human rights of people who have been in situations of human trafficking. In particular, poverty should be specified as one of the "other forms of coercion" in the Protocol.

Trafficking in persons is more lucrative than trafficking in drugs because a person can be sold over and over. Sex trafficking is one of the most profitable industries of organized crime. Worldwide, human trafficking is a business that is worth $32 billion and that feeds on the demand for cheap labour. As such, it is closely linked to the excessive profit-seeking that is at the heart of the global financial and economic model.

Trafficking in women and children is both a human rights violation and a development issue. It has tremendous human, social and economic costs, contributing to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. Trafficking in children deprives them of an education and the opportunity to achieve their full potential, robbing poor countries of their most vital resource for development: their people.

In our experience, in many countries the response to victims of human trafficking needs to be more human-centred. Recognition of the victim as a "victim" and the rights of the victim need to be central. This includes being culturally sensitive to victims, and being aware of language difficulties, of the need for trauma counselling, of the fact that victims may have little education and no awareness of their rights, and that they may be afraid of both traffickers and immigration officials. Victims find it difficult to access some services because of criminal justice systems. Safe, adequate and affordable housing is a problem for trafficked persons. Another concern is when women have to return to prostitution, a form of violence against women, to make ends meet because of a lack of education and options for decent work.

As Roger Plant, Head of the Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour of the International Labour Organization, said at the fifth conference on international perspectives on law enforcement cooperation in combating trafficking in human beings and trafficking for labour exploitation, "an ongoing debate among legislators and law enforcement officers is whether coercion is a necessary condition to make up the offence of human trafficking, or whether an employer who subjects workers to inhuman or degrading conditions, with earnings way below the legal minimum or the national average, can also be convicted of the offence".

The international community should scrutinize the broader situation concerning the demand for cheaper goods and services. That is, does the demand for cheaper goods lead to the exploitation of workers? An example of this is the child slavery that occurs in the cocoa and cotton industries.

Knowing the complexity of the human trafficking issue, we recognize the importance of collaboration between Government agencies and civil society. Non-governmental organizations with international structures and connections work at the grass-roots level and have a vital role to play in the areas of awareness-raising, advocacy and the provision of information to Governments on issues faced by the survivors of trafficking.

Recommendations

We encourage and call on Governments to continue working together internationally to find ways, collaboratively, in an effort to prevent and eradicate human trafficking.

We encourage Governments to institute laws addressing demand by criminalizing the purchase of sex. For example, in Sweden the purchasers of sex are prosecuted. This, in turn, has led to a decrease in human trafficking for sexual purposes.

We encourage Governments to promote educational programmes on gender issues and human trafficking as part of school curricula in countries of origin, transition and, especially, destination.

We urge Governments to implement policies that address the financial and environmental causes of mass migration.

We urge Governments to take seriously the following, which is contained in the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons: the promotion and protection of human rights of victims of trafficking in persons, the

prevention of trafficking in persons by addressing the social, economic, cultural, political and other contributing factors and the strengthening of the criminal justice response are at the centre of all efforts to prevent and combat trafficking in persons and to protect, assist and provide redress to victims (General Assembly resolution 64/293, annex, para. 3).

We urge Governments to recognize the important roles that poverty, marginalization and the lack of socio-economic opportunities play in forcing persons into trafficked situations. For example, the "Delphi indicators" (four sets of operational indicators of human trafficking (involving adults and children for labour and sexual exploitation) resulting from a joint project of the European Commission and the International Labour Organization) demonstrate an understanding of how poverty can be coercive.

We encourage Governments to adopt a person-centred, not victim-centred, rights-based approach to the issue of human trafficking, which puts the emphasis on the protection of the rights of people who have been in situations of trafficking, and recommend that a human rights approach be taken in determining visa frameworks and the provision of support to survivors of trafficking. Such an approach should not be based on a criminal justice scheme or approach. This will also encourage trafficked persons to come forward and testify, and will ensure better success in the prosecution of traffickers.

We urge Governments to set in place a process for family reunification and settlement services so that families can be safely reunited and rehabilitated, and provided with financial and other holistic support.

Finally we urge Governments to provide good reintegration and rehabilitation programmes to ensure that survivors of trafficking are not trafficked again.

We realize that we are all one on this planet and therefore we encourage changing the social and economic structures that support the conditions that cause human trafficking.

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Dominican Leadership Conference, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd and Passionists International.

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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Baha'i International Community, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Poverty eradication programmes have generally focused on the creation of material wealth. While these measures have improved living standards in some parts of the world, inequality remains widespread. In its 2005 *Report on the World Social Situation*, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat highlighted the growing chasm between formal and informal economies, the widening gap between skilled and unskilled workers and the growing disparities in health and education, as well as in opportunities for social, economic and political participation. It has been well documented that the focus on growth and income generation has not necessarily translated into significant social improvements, and that growing inequality has rendered the global community increasingly unstable and insecure.

The Baha'i International Community wishes to contribute to the Commission's discussion of poverty eradication by considering the related phenomena of the extremes of poverty and wealth. While the goal of poverty eradication is widely endorsed, the notion of eliminating extremes of wealth is challenging to many. Some fear that it could be used to undermine the market economy, to stifle entrepreneurship or to impose income equalization measures. This is not what we mean. To be sure, material wealth is of critical importance to the achievement of individual and collective goals; by the same token, a strong economy is a key component of a vibrant social order. We propose that recognition of the problem of the extremes of poverty and wealth concerns itself, in essence, with the nature of relationships that bind individuals, communities and nations. Today, most of the world's people live in societies characterized by relationships of dominance — whether of one nation over another, one race by another, one social class by another, one religious or ethnic group by another, or one sex by another. In this context, a discourse on the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth presumes that societies cannot flourish in an environment that fuels inequitable access to resources, to knowledge and to meaningful participation in the life of society.

In this contribution, we briefly reflect on the manner in which the following aspects of society contribute to these extremes: a materialistic worldview, assumptions about human nature, the means of generating wealth and access to knowledge. We propose an alternative set of assumptions and consider how these might advance a more equitable economic environment.

The dominant model of development depends on a society of vigorous consumers of material goods. Endlessly rising levels of consumption are cast as indicators of progress and prosperity. This materialistic worldview, which underpins much of modern economic thinking, reduces concepts of value, human purpose and human interactions to the self-interested pursuit of material wealth. The inevitable result, an unfettered cultivation of needs and wants, has led to a system dependent on excessive consumption by the few, while reinforcing exclusion and poverty for the many.

As most people would acknowledge, however, the materialistic worldview does not capture the totality of human experience. This includes expressions of love and self-sacrifice, the quest for knowledge and justice, attraction to beauty and to truth and the search for meaning and purpose, to name but a few. In fact, the progress and vitality of the social order requires a coherent relationship between the

material and spiritual dimensions of human life. Within such an order, economic arrangements support the development of just and peaceful human relations and presume that every individual has a contribution to make to the betterment of society.

Consider that, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics, nearly 800 million adults cannot read or write; that two and a half billion people lack basic sanitation; and that nearly half of the world's children live in poverty. At the other extreme, a mere handful of individuals, approximately 500 billionaires, control 7 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP). We have an economic system that generates extreme inequality. Many assume that such inequality, while undesirable, is necessary for the generation of wealth. If the process by which wealth is accumulated is characterized by the oppression and domination of others, how, in such an environment, can we hope to mobilize the material, intellectual and moral resources needed to eradicate poverty?

Many would acknowledge that the legitimacy of wealth depends on how it is acquired and how it is expended. Wealth is commendable to the highest degree if it is acquired through earnest effort and diligent work, if the measures to generate that wealth serve to enrich society as a whole and if the wealth obtained through those measures is expended to promote knowledge, education, industry and, in general, to advance human civilization. The principle of justice can be expressed on different levels related to the process of the acquisition of wealth. Employers and their employees, for example, are bound to the laws and conventions that regulate their work. Each is expected to carry out his or her responsibilities with honesty and integrity. At another level, we can consider whether the measures generating the wealth are serving to enrich society and to promote its well-being. The various approaches to obtaining wealth must enter into the discourse on poverty eradication, so that measures which involve the exploitation of others, the monopolization and manipulation of markets and the production of goods that promote violence and tear at the social fabric can be fully explored and scrutinized by the generality of the people. For example, we can ask: Is the relationship between wages and the cost of living just and equitable? What kind of wealth-generating measures could serve to enrich the generality of people rather than a select few?

Alongside this discourse, the eradication of the extremes of poverty and wealth will require no less than a knowledge revolution. Such a revolution will need to redefine the role of every individual, community and nation in the generation and application of knowledge. It will need to acknowledge both science and religion as two complementary systems of knowledge, which throughout history have made possible the investigation of reality and the advancement of civilization. As these processes unfold, they will help to transform the quality and legitimacy of education, of science and technology, as well as patterns of consumption and production. The masses of the world's people cannot continue to be regarded only as consumers and end-users of technology originating in industrial countries. Such an orientation suffocates the necessary levels of human enterprise and creativity needed to address today's pressing challenges. The development of capacity to identify technological need, to innovate and to adapt existing technologies is vital. If successfully developed, such capacity would serve to break the unbalanced flow of knowledge from North to South, from urban to rural and from men to women. It would help to expand the concept of "modern" technology to one characterized by

locally defined needs and by priorities that take into account a community's material and spiritual well-being.

As expressed in the introduction to this statement, the eradication of poverty cannot be conceived in terms of improving the material wealth of the poor alone. It is a larger undertaking rooted in relationships that define the interactions between individuals, communities and nations. We invite other parties actively working to establish a more just and equitable social and economic order to engage with us in dialogue about these underlying issues in order to learn from each other and to collectively advance efforts towards these ends. We conclude with a number of questions for your consideration:

What is the purpose of an economy? What assumptions about human nature underlie our understanding of the purpose of an economy? How do we understand the concept of wealth?

In what ways do the extremes of poverty and wealth stifle development, empowerment and healthy relationships? What kinds of identities are formed with the existence of these two extremes (for example, dependent, self-righteous, consumer, producer and so forth)? How do these identities perpetuate inequality?

What is the role of knowledge — as derived from both science and religion — in transforming our economic structures and processes?

How can we conceptualize the nature and purpose of work, wealth and economic empowerment beyond notions of utility maximization on the part of self-interested individuals?

What are the roles of the individual, the community, the corporate sector and elected leaders vis-à-vis the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth? What does this look like in practice?

What are the entry points for making changes in the economy? What motivates individuals, communities, corporations and Governments to reform economic structures and processes? From where do they derive their purpose and commitment?

What widely held conceptions or beliefs hinder our ability to transform the economic systems we have today? How can these be overcome?